

# Board Opposes Mussel Bed

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DUXBURY — The shellfish advisory committee voted unanimously Wednesday not to recommend a proposed commercial mussel mariculture, which would involve leasing of 500 to 700 acres of Duxbury Bay.

It only took the committee five minutes to reach their decision after the eight members discussed the proposed mariculture with John (Mike) Hickey, a marine biologist with the shellfish program of the state Division of Marine Fisheries.

Mussel mariculture, proposed by C. Graham Hurlburt of Duxbury, has been the topic of every weekly meeting of the committee since it organized last month.

In not recommending the mussel mariculture proposal, the committee said Mr. Hurlburt was asking for too large an area, the area he is requesting would interfere with existing fisheries and usurp the privileges of those already there, and it would set a precedent. Committee members said they would, however, be willing to listen to any future proposal Mr. Hurlburt may have, particularly for presently nonproductive flats, as these are the ones they want to see developed.

The committee said they would like to see smaller grants in order to benefit more people. Members of the committee agreed a set of guidelines for grants was needed.

Duxbury selectmen recently gave Mr. Hurlburt permission to conduct preliminary tests in Duxbury Bay to determine whether the water and ocean bottom are suitable for growing mussels.

In a meeting with the shellfish advisory committee last month, Mr. Hurlburt said the area primarily under consideration is an area

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1,000 yards square on the town line north of Clark's Island.

Mr. Hickey said Mr. Hurlburt called him inquiring about grants and permits. He told him to go through the local authority first. He said it appears he is talking about rafts and floating structures also, which would call for a mariculture license.

Mr. Hickey explained the only part his department could play is if the town decides to grant Mr. Hurlburt's request, the state would have to survey the area and determine that the grant would cause no adverse effect on existing shellfish resources.

Mr. Hickey said "we've looked at mussels as a nuisance until the last two years. On the North Shore they have had mussel eradication programs with the towns spending considerable money eliminating the nuisance." These towns, he said, consider mussels a nuisance that can ruin good softshell flats.

Mr. Hickey said mussels are an underutilized shellfish species. In Maine, he said, they have spent thousands of dollars creating a

mussel market and have produced more mussels than the market can take. He said mussels don't command the price of softshell clams.

Mr. Hickey said his department has never been faced with a situation like this before. He said normally a large shellfish grant is more than 10 acres, but a 500 to 700 acre grant is "unheard of in this state in recent years." Years ago there were oyster beds of that size. Mr. Hickey said there were problems and cited the size of the grant and the species, because mussels can be a nuisance and get out of hand.

The latest grant laws were explained by Mr. Hickey. He said the intent of the aquaculture bill was to make it easier to get a grant and to give latitude to operate. The original bill was a lot broader in scope than that passed. Mr. Hickey said cities and towns put pressure on the legislature to make it more restrictive. He said a lot of towns have negated the whole intent of the bill as they have come up with restrictions.

Discussing mussels, Mr. Hickey said the blue mussel is not an enemy of the clam — it is a competitor. They will compete for space and food. He could not tell the committee what would happen in Duxbury Bay if there were a large number of mussels.

Mr. Hickey said he didn't see how anyone could grow mussels in the bay and make money on it. He said "they are not going to make money solely on mussels in this country. It is successful in Europe because of the family-type operation." He said in Europe mussels command a high price,

but in this country \$4 a bushel is a good price.

Mr. Hickey said the state allows grants up to ten years, renewable based on performance. Size of the grant, equipment used and residency are not restricted under state law. The fee ranges from \$5 to \$25 per year per acre and is set by the town. The location of the grant is up to the town. He said it is up to the town to decide if it wants to grant anything, how much and where. He said the town can legally deny the grant and Mr. Hurlburt can appeal to the state.

Speaking of grants, Mr. Hickey said "an acre grant is a big zero." No one can make a living on a one-acre grant. One man can make a living fulltime on a ten-acre grant. He said it depends whether the town wants to look at grants as a supplement or wants to talk serious aquaculture.

Mr. Hickey recommended the committee look at Duxbury Bay and decide what areas are being used commercially and recreationally, which areas don't have anything on them and mark areas where they want to give grants.

Mr. Hickey said he was not advising the committee one way or the other. He said he was "a little scared of the size, rather than the species."

Mr. Hickey said if the town decides it wants a survey, preliminary or final, the selectmen should send a letter to the director of his department requesting one.